

Jim HORN

Washington State Senate • 41st Legislative District



Dear Friends,

One of the longest legislative sessions in state history is finally over. After 163 days, spread over nearly seven months, the Legislature completed its work for the year. This was the second-longest session in state history, surpassed only by the 164-day session in 1977.

Although the Legislature passed two important transportation reform bills, there wasn't a feeling of great accomplishment when we recently adjourned for the year. Despite months of negotiations, the Legislature failed to address the most important issue facing the Eastside this year – traffic congestion.

The transportation situation caps what was a very unusual year for the Legislature. On February 28, the Nisqually earthquake damaged the Legislative Building, forcing the House and Senate to relocate their chambers for two months while the building was repaired. The Legislature moved back into its regular home soon after the regular session ended in late April.

My Olympia office has been moved temporarily from the Irv Newhouse Building because this building is being remodeled. The John A. Cherberg Building is where my temporary office is located, across the street from the Newhouse Building. I expect my office will return to the Newhouse Building by the start of the 2002 session next January.

My Olympia office staff also has undergone changes. After two years, my highly capable legislative assistant, Michelle Lewis, has left to attend law school. Natalie Zukowski is replacing her.

It continues to be a privilege to serve as your state senator. If you have questions or comments about the issues covered in my newsletter, please let me know.

Sincerely,

JIM HORN

Committee Assignments

- Transportation
- Rules
- Higher Education, ranking Republican
- State and Local Government

How You Can Reach Me

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2001 Session Report

Legislature fails to pass transportation package

For years, we've seen our transportation system become worse and worse. Seattle now has the second-worst traffic in the nation. Tacoma ranks 37th.

It takes us longer to travel to and from work, or to drive kids to their activities. Congestion is ruining our once-cherished quality of life. We need to get families and individuals moving again.

Congestion causes businesses to take longer to deliver products. In fact, Boeing and Microsoft have cited our inadequate transportation system as a major problem. If we don't start unclogging our roads and highways soon, businesses might be forced to leave Washington. That would mean lost jobs and a major hit to our economy.

If there was ever a year for the state Legislature to finally do something major about transportation, 2001 was it.

Unfortunately, that didn't happen. Despite long negotiations by transportation leaders that produced an agreement on a statewide revenue package, there wasn't enough support in the House to pass the proposal. As a result, there wasn't a vote on the package in either chamber.

Although the Senate passed a regional transportation revenue package earlier this year, it wasn't brought up for a vote in the House.

As the lead negotiator in the Senate, I was extremely disappointed that we couldn't pass either a statewide package or a regional plan. What made this especially frustrating was that I believed we were very close to actually passing a package that would allow us to begin reducing congestion once and for all.



A legislative negotiating team meets with Gov. Gary Locke (standing) to discuss a transportation proposal last July. Lawmakers were meeting with the governor behind closed doors to fashion a 10-year transportation plan. From the foreground, counterclockwise, are Sens. Horn and Dan McDonald; Gov. Locke; and Sens. Mary Margaret Haugen and Georgia Gardner.

State package

The latest version of the state package included a 9-cent increase in the state gas tax, spread out over three years; a 1.5 percent sales-tax increase on new and used cars, and a 20 percent increase on weight fees paid by truckers and RV owners.

While I don't like to raise taxes, I realize that the state needs billions of dollars to pay for the necessary highway projects that will help reduce congestion. A proposed gas tax increase is the fairest way to raise that money.

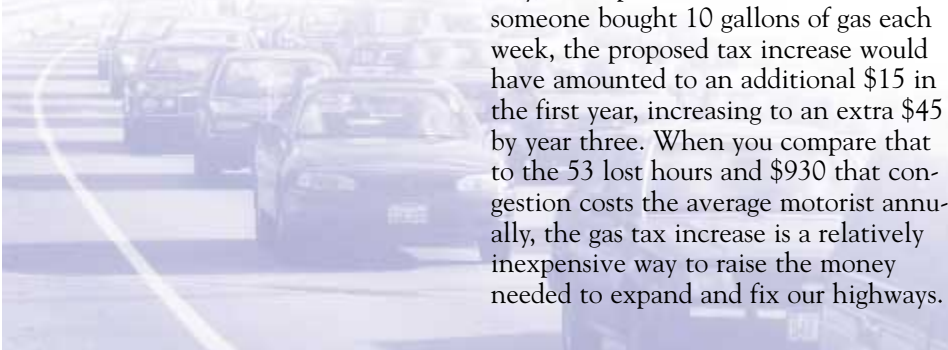
While the proposed gas tax increase would have been the most in state history, it's important to realize that if someone bought 10 gallons of gas each week, the proposed tax increase would have amounted to an additional \$15 in the first year, increasing to an extra \$45 by year three. When you compare that to the 53 lost hours and \$930 that congestion costs the average motorist annually, the gas tax increase is a relatively inexpensive way to raise the money needed to expand and fix our highways.

Regional package

Under the regional package, a special committee selected by King, Pierce and Snohomish county council members would have presented a tax and project package to those councilors, and then to the voters of the three counties. The projects would have included the 520 Bridge, the I-405/SR 167 interchange, more park-and-ride lots along the I-405 corridor, and other important projects on the Eastside. The money raised under this plan would have stayed in our region. It was the best way to deal with our huge road and highway project needs.

What happens next

Soon after the transportation package fell apart, Gov. Locke and key Republican legislators blamed each other for the lack of action. Though there is plenty of blame to go around, it doesn't solve the problem. Legislators and the governor have to look forward and keep working toward a solution that can pass in the Legislature.



During the next few months, other transportation leaders and I will continue to meet in the hope of creating a package that can pass out of the Legislature. We can't stop trying to fix our transportation problems. These problems are too great to ignore. We will keep trying and, maybe with luck, we will reach agreement on a regional transportation solution this year. If that happens, the governor will call a fourth special session for its passage.



Transportation reform measures enacted

The Legislature and Gov. Locke did approve two measures that help reform Washington's transportation system: Senate Bill 6188 streamlines the environmental permitting process for transportation projects. One of the main reasons why road and highway construction projects take so long to complete is the lengthy permitting process. Since the permitting phase causes construction costs to rise, it means the state spends money on time. This measure will make a huge difference in getting road projects completed faster and helping reduce traffic congestion.

House Bill 1680 extends design-build for public works. Under the design-build process, a single contractor can be given the bid to handle both the designing and building of a project. This process saves time and money on projects. This bill authorizes the Department of Transportation to utilize the design-build process and other ways to do construction projects over \$10 million if certain requirements are met.

What the Legislature did for K-12 education

This year, the Legislature passed several bills that affect K-12 education. One measure (E2SSB 5695) creates alternative routes for people to acquire a teaching certificate. The routes involve mentored internships that provide college graduates who do not have teaching degrees with a chance to become teachers after working for a year with experienced teachers.

Another measure (ESSB 5937) addresses our shortage of experienced teachers by creating a program that will attract retired teachers back into classrooms. Currently, state retirement plans impose restrictions on the ability of retirees to collect their pensions if they return to work in jobs covered by

the same pension plan. This bill expands post-retirement work opportunities without penalizing individuals by reducing their pension payments. TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees may work up to 1,500 hours per year without having their pensions reduced or suspended.

The new operating budget will spend \$5,520 per pupil by the 2002-03 school year. That amount was \$4,961 in the just-completed school year. Two of the reasons for this increase are because the number of K-12 students in the state has slightly declined and because of the passage of two education initiatives last fall that require higher teacher pay and lower class sizes.

A tradeoff for higher education: Higher tuition for more enrollment

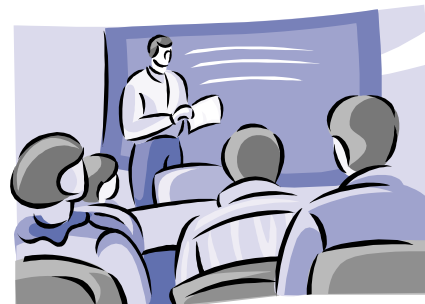
Washington's public higher education system faces a tough choice: Either keep tuition fairly low or increase access. The direction the Legislature chose to take this year is greater access. As a result, students at universities, technical colleges and community colleges will face higher tuition rates starting this fall.

I know this is not welcome news for students or those who financially support them. But the harsh reality is that under the current budget situation, the state can't support higher education in the style that students have become accustomed. With our growing enrollment demands, Washington's higher education system needed the financial means to handle the enrollment hike.

As a result, the 2001-03 budget gives university governing boards the authority to raise tuition within limits.

For Washington residents attending state colleges and universities for undergraduate and most graduate level programs, tuition may increase by up to 6.7 percent in the 2001-2002 academic year and 6.1 percent in 2002-03.

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges also has the authority to hike tuition rates by 6.7 percent for the upcoming academic year and another 6.1 percent in 2002-03. I'm fully aware that students will oppose the tuition hikes because it means they will have to pay more to attend college. But if tuition rates remained at



previous levels, colleges and universities might have been forced to cut back on classes or other programs.

I'd rather find a way to maintain the strong quality of a higher education than reduce it. I also think it is better to offer classes for more students, even with higher tuition, than to reduce the number of students who can attend college.

In exchange for allowing tuition rates to increase, the Legislature boosted the number of enrollment slots at several of our state's colleges and universities.

The University of Washington receives 458 more slots, including 161 at the main campus in Seattle, 198 at the Tacoma branch campus and 99 at the Bothell campus. Western Washington University in Bellingham picks up 300 extra slots, Eastern Washington University in Cheney receives 153 new slots, and The Evergreen State College in Olympia receives 124 additional slots.

The new state budget increases access for community and technical colleges quite a bit. These colleges will receive an additional 1,820 enrollment slots in each of the next two years. That is a 3 percent enrollment increase for community and technical colleges.

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Energy package approved

California's energy problems and our drought combined to place Washington in an energy crisis last fall. The shortage of energy supply resulted in skyrocketing energy rates that made it difficult for ratepayers to pay, especially low-income residents and large energy-consuming businesses.

This session, the Legislature passed a comprehensive measure that will help improve our energy situation. Senate Bill 2247 provides short-term and long-term tools to deal with the situation. This package creates incentives for utility companies to assist low-income energy customers to pay their energy bills. The measure raises the maximum power production threshold for new and existing power plants before they have to comply with the approval process established by the state Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC). This

change could immediately increase power production by as much as 157 megawatts, enough to supply energy to about 157,000 homes.

Blanket primary stays intact, for now

Our popular blanket primary system was adopted by voters in 1935, but the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated California's "blanket primary" law, which is very similar to Washington's in that all candidates regardless of party affiliation are listed on the ballot and voters are free to choose among them. The Supreme Court said states can't force parties to accept this method of selecting its nominees because it violates the parties' First Amendment "freedom of association" rights.

The court ruling spurred the Washington State Democratic Party to file a suit against the state, which was

later joined by the state Republican and Libertarian parties.

Despite pleas from many legislators to drop the lawsuit, the political parties refused to back off. As a result, a U.S. District Court judge gave the state until May 22 to come up with an alternative primary system. Otherwise, the court would decide the matter.

Faced with this deadline, the House and Senate approved competing versions of an alternative to the blanket primary. However, the two chambers couldn't agree on one plan, so no alternative was passed by the Legislature.

Fortunately, U.S. District Court Judge Franklin Burgess just recently rejected the state's political parties' motion to bar blanket primaries, making it likely that our blanket primary system will remain in place for the upcoming fall primaries.